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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000353

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: JUSTICE MINISTER INSISTS LEBANON ATTEND
ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Minister of Justice Charles Rizk told the Charge in their first meeting that it is imperative that Lebanon attend the March 29-30 Arab League summit in Damascus, regardless of whether it is invited. He was less insistent on who should represent Lebanon, saying that ideally, the whole Council of Ministers should attend since it currently holds presidential powers. Rizk emphasized the importance of the Special Tribunal to Lebanon's sovereignty, referring to it as Lebanon's "big stick." He also noted that the MOJ would issue indictments for the 2007 Ain Alaq bus bombings next week. End Summary.

2. (C) On March 7, the Charge, accompanied by PolOff, called on Minister of Justice Charles Rizk at his home in Achrafieh, following his recent trip to South America and Washington, D.C.

LEBANON MUST ATTEND THE ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT

3. (C) Rizk was clear about whether Lebanon should attend the March 29-30 Arab League summit in Damascus: "We don't have to wait to be invited. Lebanon was a founding member of the Arab League!" He was less insistent on who should represent Lebanon, saying that it should really be the entire Council of Ministers, since it now holds presidential powers. Recognizing that this solution is impractical, however, he said it was fine if Prime Minister Fouad Siniora attended, or identified other ministers. He mentioned that the Council of Ministers planned to meet on March 10, and perhaps it would decide at that time on Lebanon's delegation.

COUNTERING SYRIA THROUGH
PRESSURE AND IMMIGRANTS

4. (C) Rizk relayed negotiations he had with Syrian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Faisal Mikdad while in South America for an Arab-Latin American ministerial meeting, saying that Mikdad had tried to reject his draft text for the meeting on the situation in Lebanon. Mikdad was eventually coerced by Venezuelan and Argentinean pressure to accept a version of what Rizk was proposing, leading Rizk to conclude that Syria only responds to force. The other way to counter Syrian influence in Lebanon is by giving the right to vote to

the millions of Lebanese living abroad. He added, "They need to not only enjoy their rights as a Lebanese, but also to exercise them."

SPECIAL TRIBUNAL IS OUR BIG STICK

¶15. (C) Launching into his favorite topic, Rizk spoke at length about the importance of the Special Tribunal to investigate former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination and how Lebanon's sovereignty is tied to the Tribunal's success. He quoted Teddy Roosevelt's famous expression, "walk softly and carry a big stick," calling the Tribunal Lebanon's "big stick." Rizk believes Hizballah has resigned itself to accepting the Tribunal and quoted Hizballah's Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassim as saying Hizballah should stop opposing the Tribunal because it is in the UN's hands now.

¶16. (C) Rizk criticized former UNIIIC Commissioner Serge Brammertz for his repeated public statements that UNIIIC did not yet have a case, saying that it is imperative to have a case since GOL representatives have made major appeals to the international community. He also believed the Tribunal could have started a long time ago, lamenting, "When you have such a big weapon, why not use it?" Holding out hope for UNIIIC's new Commissioner and Prosecutor-designate Daniel Bellemare, Rizk wants to see indictments as soon as possible, and proudly relayed that next week the MOJ will issue indictments for the 2007 Ain Alaq bus bombings.

THE STATE OF THE MOJ

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¶17. (C) Excited about the recent \$7million announcement of funding from USAID to strengthen the independence of the Lebanese judiciary and increase citizen access to justice, Rizk said he has big hopes for developing the MOJ's judicial training institute. He relayed that although Syria tried its best to control all aspects of the GOL during its occupation, the MOJ was the least contaminated by political events. He described the high quality of its judges, and noted that 50 percent of them are women. Referring to the split with his childhood friend, former President Emile Lahoud, Rizk said that the MOJ needs a president who recognizes the independence of the judiciary branch. Rizk illustrated how Lahoud was not supportive of the MOJ by saying he refused to authorize the rotation of judges, a necessary step according to Rizk. Lahoud had thus contaminated not only the independence of the executive branch, but also harmed the judicial branch of government.
SISON